DR. STRANGE TM
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
35¢
CC
26
DEC
02914
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS
DOCTOR STRANGE
TM
©1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
MYSTIC MAYHEM IN A UNIVERSE GONE MAD!
THE RETURN OF THE ANCIENT ONE!

Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other——

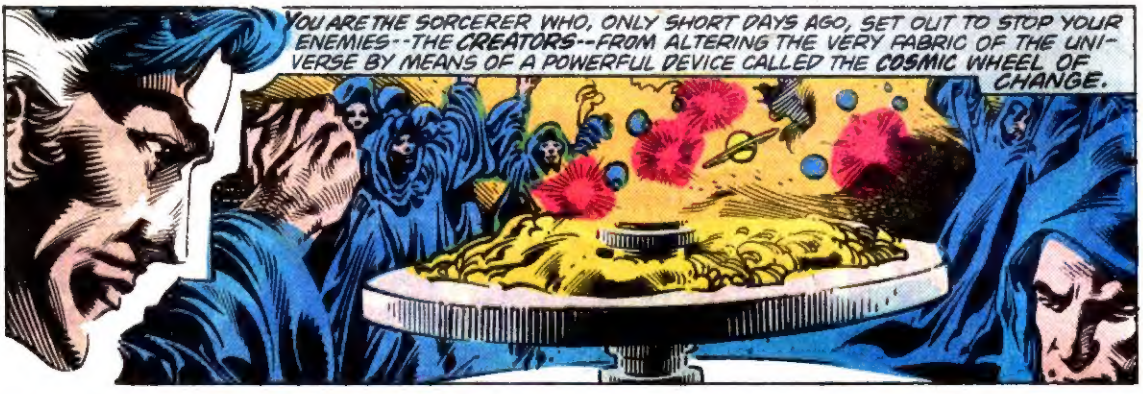
Stan Lee presents: Dr. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

STARLIN LAYOUT/STORY | NEBRES FINISHED ART | KAWECKI, LETTERER COHEN & RACHE, COLORISTS | GOODWIN EDITOR

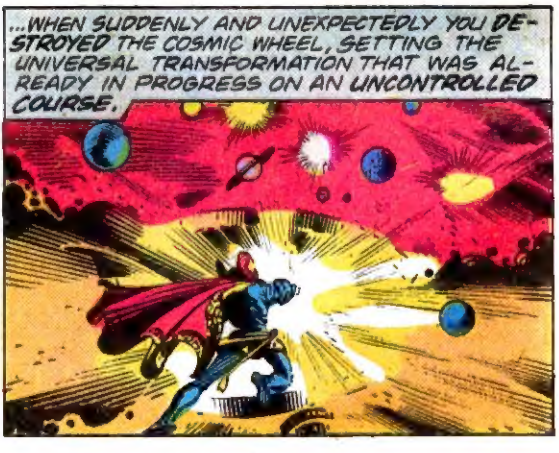
The RETURN OF THE ANCIENT ONE!

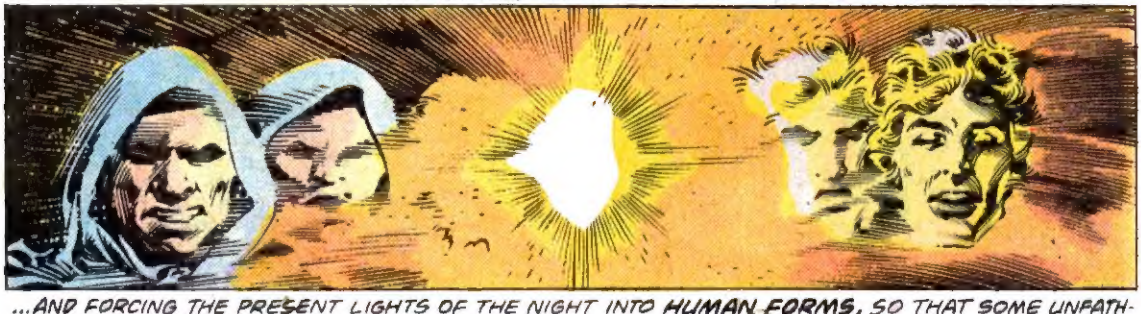
YOU SIT SURROUNDED BY--AND ARE PART OF--A SERIES OF BIZARRE SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS.
TO YOUR RIGHT HANGS YOUR BOAR-HEADED DOUBLE, DEFEATED AND IMPRISONED BY YOUR MYSTIC MIGHT.*
YOU BOTH FLOAT WITHIN THE CHAMBER'S TRANQUILITY, WELL AWARE OF THE MAD FRENZY OCCURRING BEYOND ITS WALLS.
YOU REFLECT ON THE PARALLELS AND DIFFERENCES AND--DESPITE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION --YOU SMILE.
FOR ARE YOU NOT --DR. STRANGE?
*LAST ISSUE--ARCHIE.

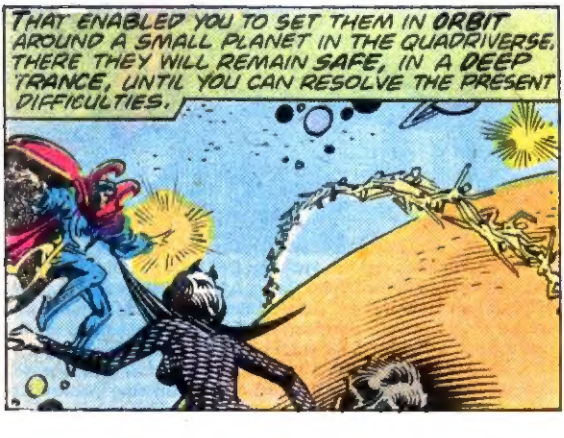
DOCTOR STRANGE™ is published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. Published bi-monthly. Copyright ©1977 by Marvel Comics Group. A Division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Vol. 1, No. 26, December, 1977 issue. Price 35¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $4.50 for 12 issues. Canada, $5.50. Foreign, $6.50. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. DOCTOR STRANGE (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP.

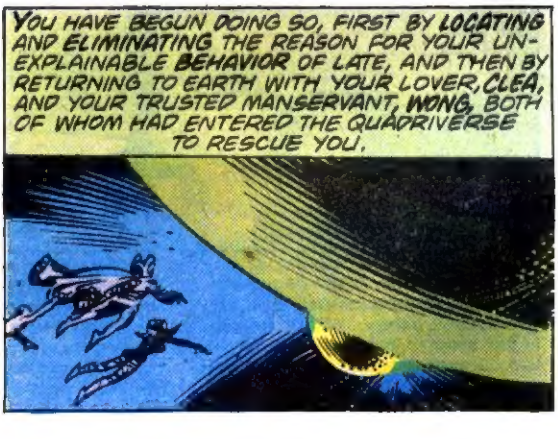

YOU ARE THE SORCERER WHO, ONLY SHORT DAYS AGO, SET OUT TO STOP YOUR ENEMIES--THE CREATORS--FROM ALTERING THE VERY FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE BY MEANS OF A POWERFUL DEVICE CALLED THE COSMIC WHEEL OF CHANGE.

REMEMBER HOW YOU JOINED FORCES WITH AN ACTUAL LIVING STAR IN HUMAN GUISE, NAMED APALLA, AND WERE MERE MOMENTS AWAY FROM DEFEATING THE CREATORS...


...WHEN SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY YOU DESTROYED THE COSMIC WHEEL, SETTING THE UNIVERSAL TRANSFORMATION THAT WAS ALREADY IN PROGRESS ON AN UNCONTROLLED COURSE.


IN THE END, YOUR FOOLISHNESS ACHIEVED THE VERY GOAL YOU HAD SET OUT TO THWART: NAMELY TURNING THE CREATORS INTO STARS, THE UNIVERSE'S MOST POWERFUL BEINGS...
...AND FORCING THE PRESENT LIGHTS OF THE NIGHT INTO HUMAN FORMS, SO THAT SOME UNFATHOMABLE COSMIC BALANCE COULD BE MAINTAINED. FORTUNATELY, THE SUDDEN CHANGE RENDERED THE STARS (NOW LIVING PEOPLE) UNCONSCIOUS.


THAT ENABLED YOU TO SET THEM IN ORBIT AROUND A SMALL PLANET IN THE QUADRIVERSE, THERE THEY WILL REMAIN SAFE, IN A DEEP TRANCE, UNTIL YOU CAN RESOLVE THE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES.


YOU HAVE BEGUN DOING SO, FIRST BY LOCATING AND ELIMINATING THE REASON FOR YOUR UNEXPLAINABLE BEHAVIOR OF LATE, AND THEN BY RETURNING TO EARTH WITH YOUR LOVER, CLEA, AND YOUR TRUSTED MANSERVANT, WONG, BOTH OF WHOM HAD ENTERED THE QUADRIVERSE TO RESCUE YOU.

ON EARTH, YOU LEARNED THAT THE CREATORS' STELLAR INFLUENCE HAS ALREADY BECOME APPARENT.
MANKIND HAS BECOME BESTIAL, THE LAWS OF NATURE TRANSFORMED INTO PERVERSE JOKES --AND CHAOS RULES SUPREME.
BEING STARS, THE CREATORS CAN NOW INFLUENCE ANYTHING IN ANY MANNER THEY PLEASE--FOR THEY ARE THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF ALL ENERGY... ELECTRICAL, ATOMIC AND MAGICAL.
WITH THIS POWER THEY PLAN TO RULE ALL LIVING THINGS. TO ENFORCE THEIR EDICTS, THEY HAVE ENDOWED SPECIAL AGENTS WITH MASSIVE, YET CRUDELY REFINED, MAGICAL ENERGIES.
DR. STRANGER YET WAS ONE SUCH AGENT, WHOSE TASK WAS TO REPLACE YOU AS MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.
A JOB AT WHICH HE FAILED.
BUT JUST BARELY...
SO HERE WE ARE, MY BESTIAL BROTHER, YOU ARE MY HELPLESS PRISONER...
...AND I AM, IN TURN, A BEWILDERED INMATE IN THE ASYLUM THAT IS NOW MY WORLD.
WHAT DO I DO NOW?
I COULD GIVE YOU A NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS, STRANGE--NONE OF WHICH, I'M SURE, YOU'D APPRECIATE.

PERHAPS...THEN AGAIN, PERHAPS NOT.
OR, STRANGER YET IS STILL WEAKENED FROM OUR BATTLE, AND MYSTICALLY RESTRAINED. YES, PERHAPS...
IF I ACT QUICKLY ENOUGH, BEFORE HE HAS TIME TO ERECT MENTAL BARRIERS...
...I MAY BE ABLE TO DELVE INTO HIS MIND WITH THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO.
THERE I MAY FIND REVELATIONS UNDREAMED OF, AND THE ANSWERS I SEEK.
BY THE SATANNISH, NO!
BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH, I'VE DONE IT!
HIS MIND IS MINE!
FOR LONG MOMENTS, THE MYSTIC STRUGGLES TO SECURE HIS TENUOUS GRIP ON THE BRUTE'S CONSCIOUSNESS. AT LAST, HE SUCCEEDS--AND BEGINS A MINUTE STUDY OF HIS PRIZE.
HE OPENS ITS HIDDEN CHAMBERS... EXAMINES THEIR CONTENTS ...UNDERSTANDS THEIR MEANINGS...
...IS REPULSED BY THEIR RAMIFICATIONS...
...RELEASES HIS HOLD...
...AND PROMPTLY COLLAPSES.
STEPHEN! WHAT IS WRONG!?

NOTHING, NOW!
I HAVE BEEN SHARING A JOINT EGO WITH OUR GUEST, AND THE EXPERIENCE PROVED TEMPORARILY OVERWHELMING.
DESPITE MY VAST EXPERIENCE WITH ALIEN LIFE FORMS...

...I FOUND MY PRISONER'S INNER SELF VILE AND CORRUPT TO A DISTURBING EXTREME.
STILL, I WAS ABLE TO LEARN MUCH FROM HIM.

AS I SUSPECTED, THE CREATORS ARE NOT THE SOLE ARCHITECTS OF THIS COSMIC TRAGEDY.
THERE IS ANOTHER POWER BEHIND MY ROBED FOES...

...A MIGHTY DEITY REFERRED TO ONLY AS "HE WHO STANDS IN LIGHT AND DARKNESS."

BUT I ALSO LEARNED SOMETHING EVEN MORE IMPORTANT FROM OUR GUEST!

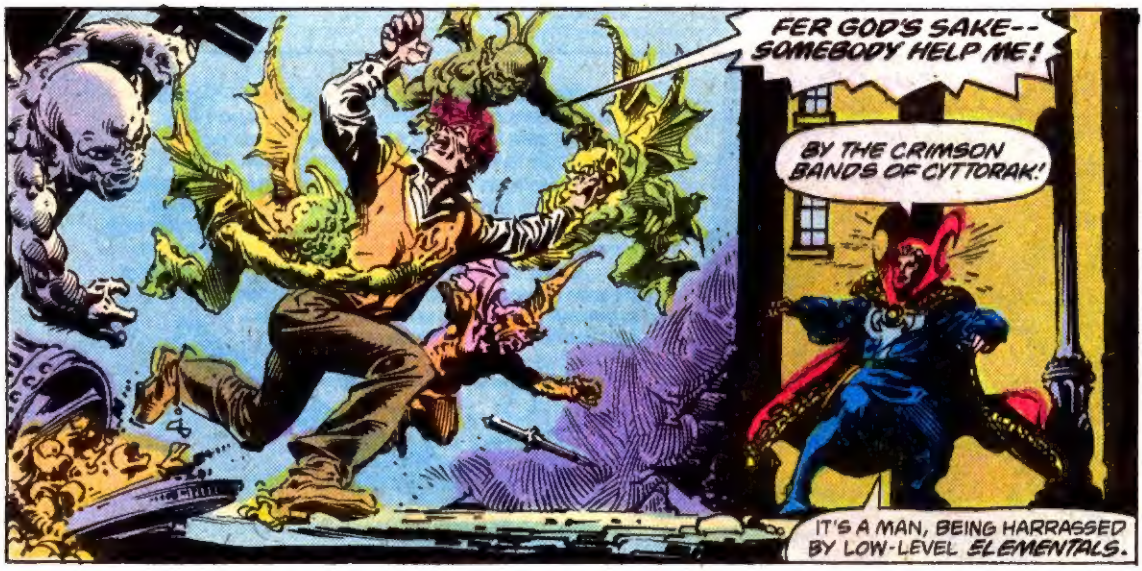
MY MENTOR, THE ANCIENT ONE, HAS ABANDONED THE HIGHER STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS HE HAD ATTAINED.
HE IS NO LONGER ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE.

HE HAS FOR A NUMBER OF WEEKS BEEN EXISTING IN A CORPOREAL FORM HERE IN NEW YORK.
WHY HE HAS NOT CONTACTED ME IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE --AND IS UNKNOWN EVEN BY DR. STRANGE YET.

BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, I MUST NOW RUSH TO HIS SIDE--FOR THE ANCIENT ONE'S KNOWLEDGE IS EARTH'S ONLY HOPE FOR SALVATION.
CLEA, GUARD MY BROTHER, HERE, CAREFULLY--FOR I AM OFF TO...

...THE BOWERY, LOCATED ON NEW YORK CITY'S LOWER EAST SIDE, IT IS A SECTION OF TOWN LONG ABANDONED BY NEARLY ALL. THE RESPECTABLE AVOID IT, THE CITY GOVERNMENT TRIES TO IGNORE IT, AND ONLY THE DIRT POOR AND THE STUBBORN LIVE THERE.
THE AREA IS CHIEFLY KNOWN FOR ITS OVER-ABUNDANCE OF WHAT SOME MAY CALL LOST SOULS. OTHERS REFER TO THEM AS DRUNKS--OR WINOS--OR HUMAN DERELICTS. CHOOSE YOUR OWN LABEL.
YET NO MATTER WHAT NAME YOU PICK, IT IS NONETHELESS OUR DESTINY NOW TO FOCUS ON TWO SUCH MEN.
HOW GOES IT, POP?
SEE YA GOT ANOTHER BOTTLE...
THANKS! SAY, HOW IS IT YA ALWAYS SEEM SO WELL-STOCKED WITH THE HOOCH?
GOT SOME BREAD STASHED?
NO...
IT IS...NOTHING... BUT A SMALL SPELL...
...W...W...WITNESS!
HEY! HOW'D YOU DO THAT?!
IT IS... SIMPLY ...MAGIC.
C'MON, OL' MAN, DON'T HAND ME THAT BULL!
HOW'D YOU DO IT!?
BY...MAGIC...
LISTEN, OLD MAN! I AIN'T IN NO MOOD TO BE SNOWED RIGHT NOW, HEAR?
SO YOU BEST START LAYING OUT THE STRAIGHT, SKINNY...
...OR YER GONNA FIND YOURSELF... ALL CUT UP!

I WOULD NOT DO THAT IF I WERE YOU.
YEAH? WHAT YA GONNA DO ABOUT IT, YA OLD BAG 'O BONES?
JUST THIS.
MEANWHILE, BACK AT DR. STRANGE'S SANCTUM.
BY DORMAMMU'S DEMONS!
THIS SHOULD HOLD HIM!
MISTRESS, WHAT IS WRONG?
OUR CAPTIVE WAS TRANSMITTING A TELEPATHIC COMMUNIQUE.
ABOUT US?
NO. HE HAD NO TIME TO SPEAK OF US...
"...HIS MESSAGE CONCERNED STEPHEN'S VISIT TO THE BOWERY.
I UNDERSTAND NONE OF THIS. WHY HAS THE ANCIENT ONE RETURNED TO THE FLESH...
...AND WHY HAS HE CHOSEN TO QUARTER HIMSELF IN THIS SECTION OF THE CITY--INSTEAD OF COMING TO MY SANCTUM?
HELP!


FER GOD'S SAKE-- SOMEBODY HELP ME!
BY THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK!
IT'S A MAN, BEING HARRASSED BY LOW-LEVEL ELEMENTALS.

THEY'RE HARMLESS CREATURES, BUT FRIGHTENING TO THE UNINITIATED.
WHAT'S TRULY ODD IS THE FACT THAT THIS MAN SEEMS LESS BESTIAL THAN ANYONE I'VE YET COME ACROSS SINCE THIS WHOLE THING STARTED!
I THINK I'D BEST DISPEL THE ELEMENTALS AND INVESTIGATE THIS.

BY THE GODS, BUT HE CERTAINLY REEKS OF CHEAP WINE!
WHAT HAS OCCURRED HERE?
IT WAS HORRIBLE!
I WAS ONLY TALKING WITH HIM...ONLY TALKING... AND THAT OL' CHINK ZAPS THOSE THINGS ON ME...
HE...
WHAT...?

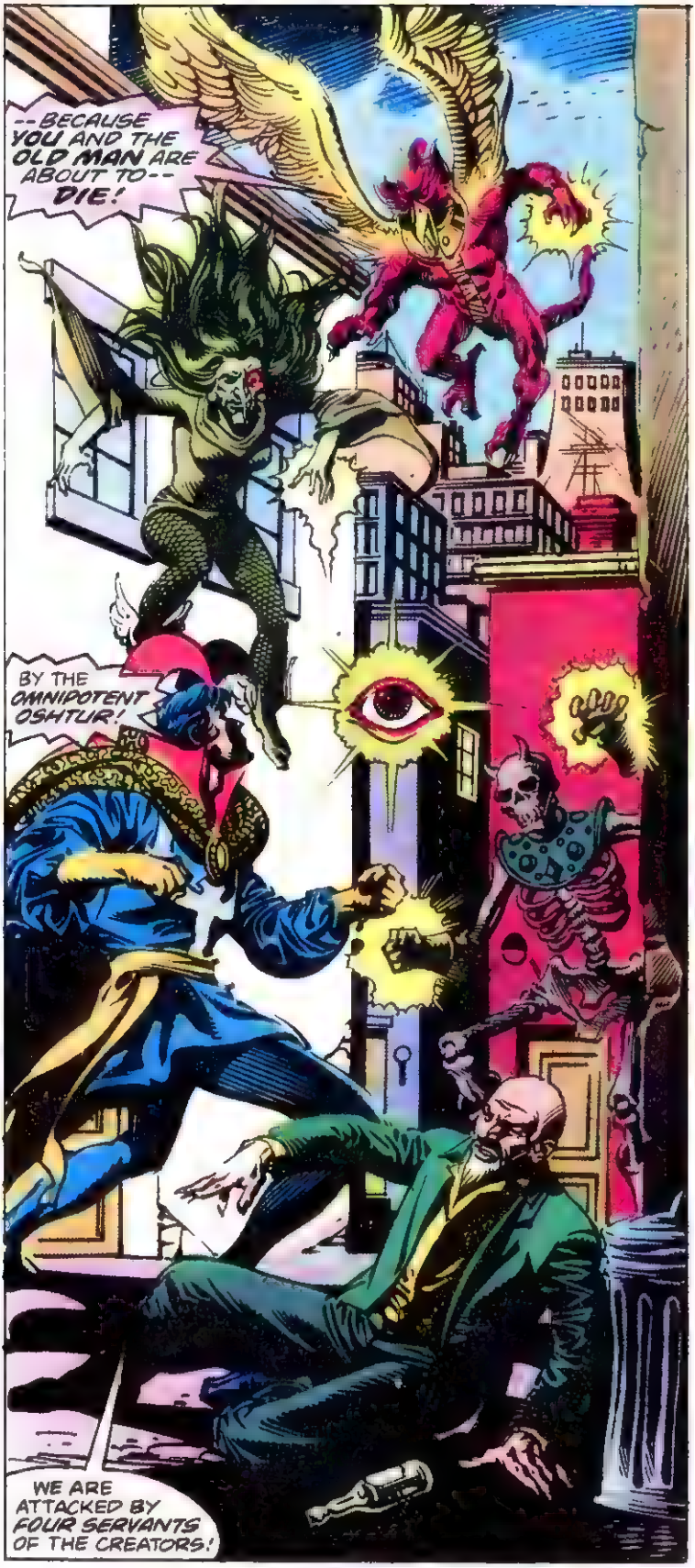
COULD IT BE? YES-- IT MUST BE HIM!
NO ONE ELSE IN THIS AREA WOULD HAVE THE POWER AND MERCY TO HANDLE WHAT OBVIOUSLY MUST HAVE BEEN A MUGGING IN SUCH A MANNER.

YET, AGAIN I ASK, WHY IS HE HERE?
HE ALWAYS AVOIDED CITIES, BEFORE--PREFERRING HIS TIBETAN MOUNTAIN RETREAT, INSTEAD.

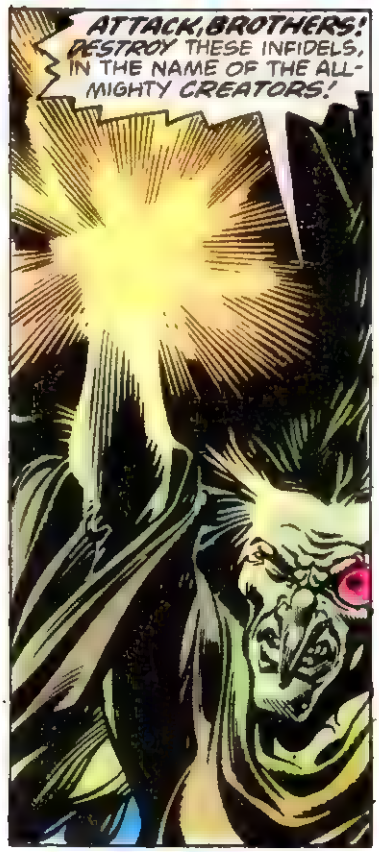
SO WHY...
BY THE SINISTER SONS OF SATANNISH--NO!

THIS CANNOT BE!
BUT IT IS! IT IS THE ANCIENT ONE!
MASTER! WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU? SPEAK TO ME!
WHO?
IT IS I-- STEPHEN STRANGE!
STEPHEN!
THANK ETERNITY... YOU HAVE RETURNED... I COULD NOT HAVE LASTED... MUCH LONGER.
WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED WITH YOU, MASTER? WHEN LAST WE MET...

"...I WAS ONE WITH THE UNIVERSE, FREE OF THE BURDENS OF THE BODY. NOW YOU FIND ME DRUNKEN AND DIRTY. SAD, IS IT NOT?
"BUT THERE IS A REASON FOR IT, STEPHEN, FOR WHEN THE UNIVERSE UNDERWENT ITS DRASTIC ALTERATION, I WAS INCLUDED IN THAT CHANGE!
"THE TRANSFORMATION PROVED SOUL-SHATTERINGLY DISORIENTING, PAINFUL AND MORE THAN EVEN MY POWER COULD COPE WITH.
"I TOOK REFUGE IN A MORTAL SHELL--DETERMINED THE CAUSE OF THIS HAVOC--AND CAME IN SEARCH OF YOU, FOR AID IN REMEDYING THE SITUATION.
SMILERS
BILBO
"UNFORTUNATELY, YOU PROVED BEYOND REACH OF MY NOW-LIMITED POWERS--FOR, ALONE IN MORTAL FORM, I DO NOT POSSESS THE MIGHT NECESSARY TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE.
"SO, MY SON, I WAITED--AND BEGAN TO CONSUME VAST AMOUNTS OF INEXPENSIVE WINE, FOR ALCOHOL RETARDS THE CHANGE THE CREATORS ARE INFLICTING UPON MANKIND, AND EASES THE AGONY MY SOUL SUFFERS."
BUT I DO NOT UNDERSTAND! YOU SAY YOU WAITED WEEKS FOR MY RETURN--YET I HAVE BEEN AWAY LESS THAN A SINGLE DAY.
UNLESS...
JUST AS I THOUGHT! I ENTERED THE QUADRIVERSE ON JUNE 15th...
...BUT THIS PAPER IS DATED JULY 29th!
THE CREATORS OBVIOUSLY MANIPULATED MY TIME FLOW, SO THAT EARTH SPED WEEKS AHEAD OF ME WHILE I WAS IN THE QUADRIVERSE.
THEY MUST HAVE DONE THE SAME TO WONG AND CLEA...
...BUT WHY?
THAT, DR. STRANGE, IS SOMETHING IS WILL NEVER LEARN--

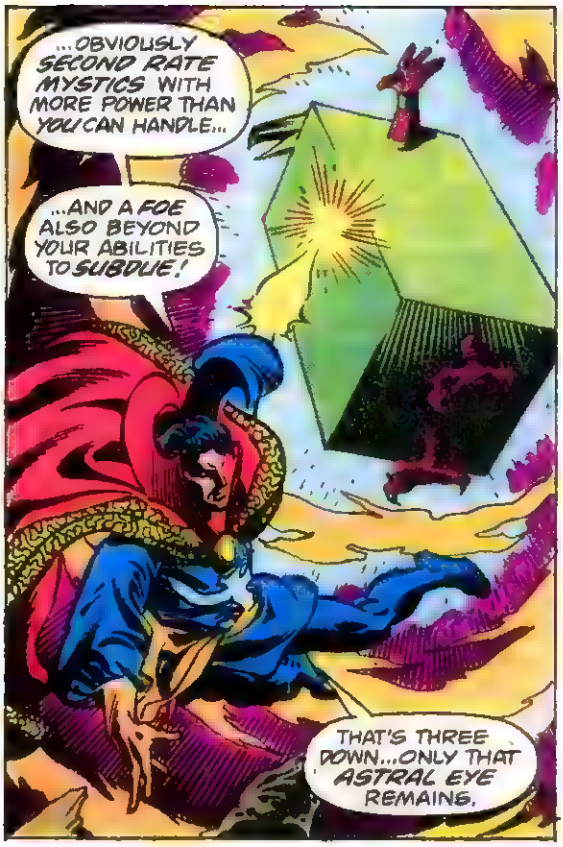

--BECAUSE YOU AND THE OLD MAN ARE ABOUT TO-- DIE!
BY THE OMNIPOTENT OSHTUR!
WE ARE ATTACKED BY FOUR SERVANTS OF THE CREATORS!

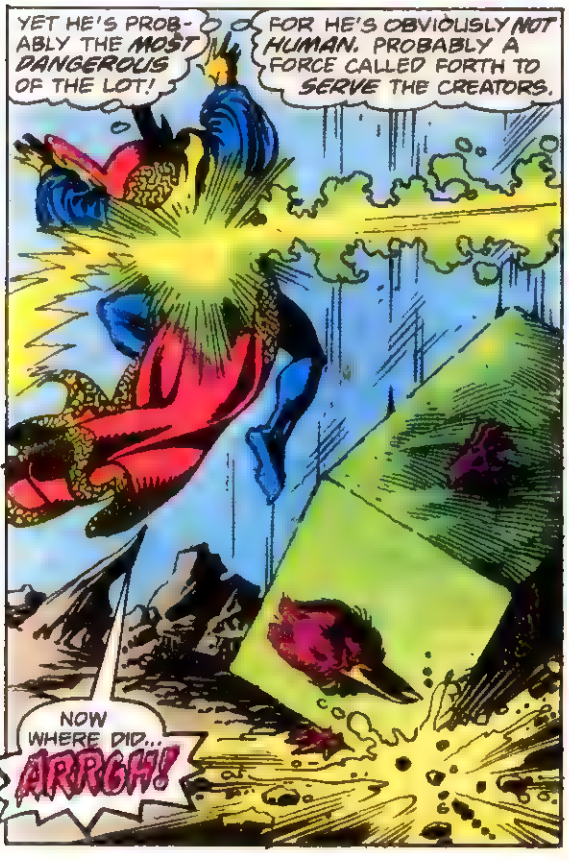
THE ANCIENT ONE IS TOO RAVAGED BY THE EFFECTS OF THE ALCOHOL TO BE OF ANY HELP--
--SO IT IS UP TO ME TO DEFEND US BOTH!


ATTACK, BROTHERS! DESTROY THESE INFIDELS, IN THE NAME OF THE ALL-MIGHTY CREATORS!

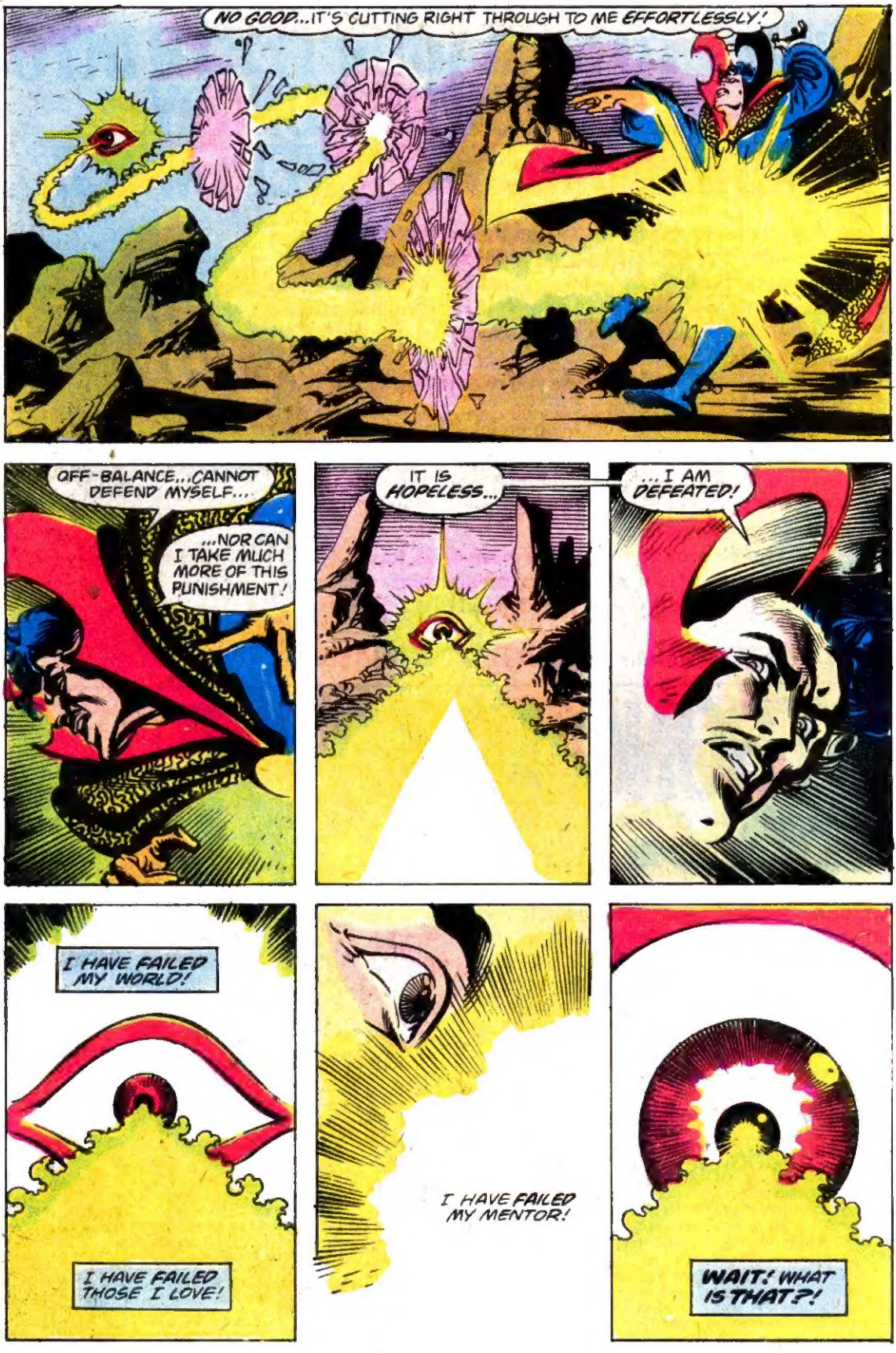
BY THE SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM, THEIR ASSAULT IS LAYING WASTE TO THE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOOD!
BUT IT IS PRECISELY THAT WHICH GIVES ME NEW HOPE!
FOR IT SHOWS THAT--AS MIGHTY AS THESE ZEALOTS ARE--THEY'VE NOT YET BECOME PROFICIENT AT THEIR SKILLS.
THEIR ATTACK IS UNFOCUSED.. INEFFICIENT... GIVING ME MORE THAN ENOUGH OF AN OPENING TO...
...COUNTERATTACK!
A SIMPLE BLAST OF PURE, PRECISELY-DIRECTED MYSTICAL FORCE DISPATCHED MY SKELETAL FOE...
...AND THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK WILL RESTRAIN THIS MACBETHIAN FEMME FATALE.

YOU DARE MOCK US?!
DO YOU NOT REALIZE THAT WE ARE THE HIGH PRIESTS OF THE NEW ORDER? WE ARE...

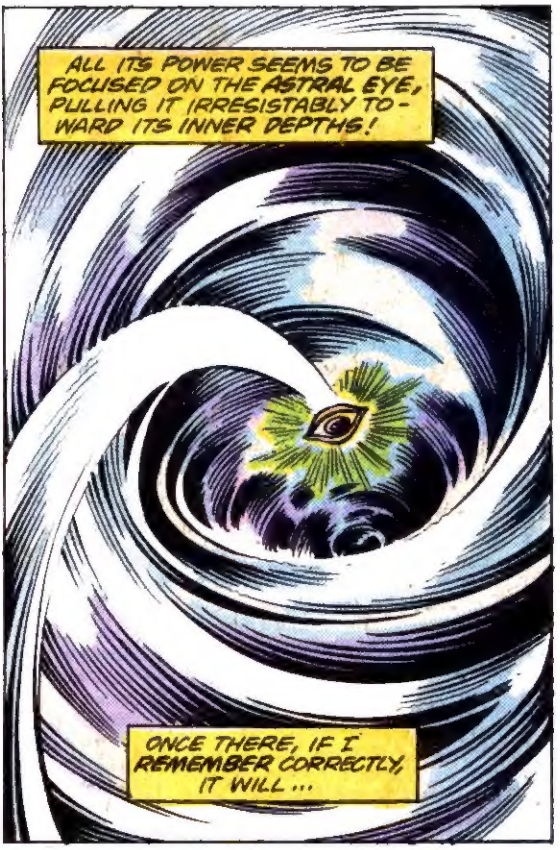

...OBVIOUSLY SECOND RATE MYSTICS WITH MORE POWER THAN YOU CAN HANDLE...
...AND A FOE ALSO BEYOND YOUR ABILITIES TO SUBDUE!
THAT'S THREE DOWN...ONLY THAT ASTRAL EYE REMAINS.


YET HE'S PROBABLY THE MOST DANGEROUS OF THE LOT!
FOR HE'S OBVIOUSLY NOT HUMAN. PROBABLY A FORCE CALLED FORTH TO SERVE THE CREATORS.
NOW WHERE DID...
ARRGH!

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE AGAIN... MUST SET UP DEFENSES...


NO GOOD...IT'S CUTTING RIGHT THROUGH TO ME EFFORTLESSLY!
OFF-BALANCE...CANNOT DEFEND MYSELF....
...NOR CAN I TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS PUNISHMENT!
IT IS HOPELESS...
...I AM DEFEATED!
I HAVE FAILED MY WORLD!
I HAVE FAILED THOSE I LOVE!
I HAVE FAILED MY MENTOR!
WAIT! WHAT IS THAT?!

IT'S A MYSTICAL VORTEX--SPRINGING OUT OF NOWHERE--
--YET ITS INCREDIBLE SUCTION IS HAVING LITTLE EFFECT ON ME!


ALL ITS POWER SEEMS TO BE FOCUSED ON THE ASTRAL EYE, PULLING IT IRRESISTABLY TOWARD ITS INNER DEPTHS!
ONCE THERE, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY, IT WILL ...

...IMPRISON THE FORCE WITHIN A SPHERE OF MYSTIC CONTAINMENT.

THANK YOU, MASTER.
I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED YOU WOULD NEVER FAIL ME.

BUT I NEARLY DID SO. THE SANCTUARY I HAVE SOUGHT IN ALCOHOL HAS TAKEN A GRAVE TOLL ON THIS BODY WHICH I NOW WEAR.

MY PERCEPTIONS OF THE REALITIES--AND MY REACTIONS TO THEM--HAVE BEEN SEVERELY IMPAIRED.

I NEARLY PASSED OUT --AND SLEPT THROUGH YOUR DESTRUCTION!

EVEN NOW, THIS FRAIL FORM FAILS ME.
I FEAR I NEVER WAS TRULY COMFORT-ABLE IN THIS REALITY.
MASTER!
MY SON, AHEAD OF US LIES A HERCULEAN LABOR OF GALACTIC PROPORTIONS.
I WILL BE OF LITTLE HELP TO YOU, UNTIL THE VERY END--AND, EVEN THEN, THE PAIN WILL BE YOURS TO BEAR.
NOW, I MUST CONSERVE MY ENERGIES.
I HAVE OPENED A PORTAL FOR US.
YOU WILL HAVE TO TRANSPORT US--BOTH!
THIS WILL TAKE US TO THE POWER BEHIND THE CREATORS.
WE ARE TO MEET "HE WHO STANDS IN SHADOW?"
YES. HE IS CALLED BY THAT NAME OCCASIONALLY, THOUGH I KNOW HIM BY ANOTHER.
IS HE MORTAL?
NO. NOR IS HE A FORCE LIKE THAT ASTRAL EYE OR THE DREAD DORMAMMU.
HE IS, IN TRUTH, A CONCEPT --AS IS ETERNITY!

NEXT A VERY CONGENIAL DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FATE of the UNIVERSE! (WE DON'T BELIEVE IT, EITHER!)